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**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE ANNOUNCES
GRANTS TO LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT
TO TARGET GUN VIOLENCE**

FRESNO – United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott and Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) Special Agent-in-Charge John Torres joined with local law enforcement officials from Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties to announce over approximately \$1 million in federal grants to aid local agencies to combat gun violence. These funds are in addition to approximately \$1.3 million in additional funds awarded to agencies in the northern portion of the Central Valley. The grant funds were part of the United States Department of Justice's "Project Safe Neighborhoods" initiative, a three-year old program aimed at reducing gun violence nationwide.

A key component of Project Safe Neighborhoods has been to more aggressively pursue the prosecution of convicted felons illegally possessing firearms. In most instances, federal law brings with it considerably more severe sentences than comparable California law for these types of offenses. As a result, federal officials have worked closely with local prosecutors and law enforcement agencies to identify offenders whose criminal histories and dangers to the community warrant targeted federal prosecution. Since 2003, federal prosecutions for such crimes in the Eastern District of California have increased 92%. Said United States Attorney Scott, "The combination of a convicted felon and a firearm can be a lethal combination. We can effectively reduce gun violence by taking convicted felons with guns off the streets before they use those guns."

Another important aspect of Project Safe Neighborhoods is federal grant funding to local agencies to combat gun violence. At today's press conference, the United States Attorney's Office announced approximately \$750,000 in funds to law enforcement agencies in Fresno, Tulare and Kern counties to be expended over the next three years. In Fresno and Tulare counties, funding was awarded to the Sheriff's departments to support the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). NIBIN is a nationwide program through which ATF provides computers to local law enforcement agencies, permitting those agencies to enter data into a national database that can match recovered bullets and shell casings to firearms, thereby linking suspects and firearms to multiple crimes. ATF Special Agent-in-Charge John Torres, "As a result of this sophisticated firearm database, many an unsolvable crime will now become solvable."

In addition to NIBIN funding, a number of area District Attorney offices received

funding for deputy district attorney positions. The Tulare County District Attorney's Office earlier received, and will now be able to utilize, \$240,000 to fund prosecutors. The Fresno County District Attorney's Office was awarded \$43,000 to support an additional year of funding for a Project Sentry deputy district attorney, who responsibilities include targeting gun crime. Additionally, the Kern County District Attorney's office received \$111,000 to provide ongoing funding for gun violence deputy district attorney positions.

A Project Safe Neighborhoods Selection Committee was established to solicit and review grant applications. The Selection Committee also made the final selection of which agencies were to receive grants. The committee was chaired by retired Redding Chief of Police Bob Blankenship; also serving on the committee were retired Executive Assistant United States Attorney Nancy Simpson and retired California Department of Corrections gang expert Brian Parry. This project was supported by Award No. 2004-GP-CX-0601 and 2004-GP-CX-0604 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

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